Foundations for Quality Series

Consumer Engagement

Strategies for Engaging Families

Early Childhood National Centers

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Acknowledgments

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Strategies for Engaging Families

Introduction

State, Territory, and Tribal child care administrators and others may use this resource to support consumer education and family engagement. It offers strategies to promote consumer engagement in line with the vision presented in *Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education Professionals*.

Professionals working at State, Territory, Tribal, and local levels may find these strategies useful for engaging parents as consumers in plans, processes, and programs that are part of an agency's everyday responsibilities. These areas of responsibility include: consumer education, subsidy administration, QRIS, and other general efforts to improve quality and access to services.

In this resource we offer an overview of consumer engagement, three keys to effective consumer engagement, and eight strategies that may be used to engage families as consumers and to better understand their interests and needs.

"Professionals" and "Programs"

In this resource, professional refers to all early childhood and school-age care and education professionals working at the systems or program level.

Program refers to all early childhood and school-age care and education programs.

Keys to Consumer Engagement

Including Families' Voices
Invite and respect the full diversity of values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families.

Using Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices
Approach families in ways that show respect, encourage collaboration and promote positive relationships.

Ensuring Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness
Recognize, affirm, and showcase families' diverse cultures, knowledge, and experiences.

Strategies for Consumer Engagement

Include Interactive Features in Websites and Social Media Posts
Connect with parents online through features that encourage two-way interactions.

Conduct a Community Assessment
Enhance your understanding of families in your community by completing or reviewing a community assessment and engaging families in the process.

Hold Data Walks
Convene groups of families and professionals to review data and research findings and work together to plan responses.

Conduct Focus Groups
Invite groups of parents to come together to share their ideas, opinions and responses to questions about their interests and needs.

Conduct Surveys
Initiate or maintain contact with, and collect input from families through questionnaires about their interests, preferences, and experiences with programs and services.

Hold Town Hall Meetings
Provide a venue for families to interact with and share feedback, opinions, and questions with policy makers.

Organize Parent, Community, or World Cafés
Host welcoming, inclusive events in which parents and professionals can share information with and encourage one another.

Promote or Form Parent Leadership Groups and Parent Advisory Boards
Encourage parent involvement and leadership in decision-making processes and ongoing program development.

Consumer Engagement: Strategies for Engaging Families

Tip Consider opportunities to promote strengths-based approaches, relationship-based practices, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness before choosing or implementing any consumer engagement strategy. Opportunities might include professional development for staff and partners responsible for consumer education, consumer engagement, and implementation of any of related strategies.

Building a Shared Understanding of Consumer Engagement

What is Consumer Engagement?

Consumer engagement refers to two-way, mutually respectful interactions in which families and professionals work together to find, share, and use information in support of families' well-being and children's health, development, and learning.

While *consumer education* tends to focus on equipping parents with information they can use to make decisions about programs and services, *consumer engagement* goes beyond making information available to families. Through consumer engagement, parents and professionals share information with one another and work together to build each other's knowledge and capacities.

As families expand their knowledge and leadership capacities, they can become more effective in applying research-based information, for example, to guide their choices about a program for their child or monitor their child's experiences in a program. Or families can use their voices to advocate for higher quality and equitable access to services. As professionals expand their knowledge and capacities, they can become more effective in inviting and responding to families' interests and values, and supporting and partnering with families and other stakeholders.

Consumer engagement supports family outcomes that are related to, but different from, the outcomes of *family engagement*, as the following chart shows:

Consumer Engagement Outcomes	Family Engagement Outcomes
Families as decision makers who are equipped with information and seek access to quality early childhood and school-age care and education for their children Families as resourceful users of information and early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services that support child and family well-being throughout early childhood and beyond Families as trusted peers who help their friends and families understand and connect with the highest quality options available Families as leaders who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child's program and their community	Family Well-being Positive Parent-Child Relationships Families as Lifelong Educators Families as Learners Family Engagement in Transitions Family Connections to Peers and Community Families as Advocates and Leaders
Source: Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Professionals (2018).	*Source: Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems (2018).*

Consumer engagement is about partnering with parents to improve and support parental choice about early childhood and school-age care and education, and comprehensive services. Family engagement is about partnering with families in support of positive child and family outcomes.

> **Tip** In this resource, we focus on consumer engagement. However, many of the keys and strategies described below can be applied to both consumer engagement and family engagement. For example, the strategy "Organize parent, community or world cafes" can support consumer engagement or family engagement.
>
> For consumer engagement, this strategy can be used to support the intended outcome, *Families as leaders who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child's program and their community.*
>
> For family engagement, this strategy can support the intended outcome, *Family Connections to Peers and Community*. Refer to the *PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems* to learn more about family engagement strategies.

Consumer engagement helps to ensure that:

- families get the information and services they want in ways that are meaningful to them,
- families' strengths are valued and acknowledged, and
- professionals maximize resources dedicated to consumer education

Keys to Effective Consumer Engagement

- Including Families' Voices
- Using Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices
- Ensuring Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

Including families' voices—inviting and respecting the full diversity of values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families is key to consumer engagement.

When professionals include families' voices, they recognize families' strengths and are receptive to families' thoughts and understandings about their experiences and those of their children.

> **"Parent" and "Family"**
>
> We use the words *parent and family* to honor all adult caregivers who make a difference in a child's life.
>
> *Parents* refers to biological, adoptive, and step-parents as well as primary caregivers, such as grandparents, other adult family members, and foster parents.
>
> *Families* can be biological or nonbiological, chosen or circumstantial. Members of families are connected through cultures, languages, traditions, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support.

Parents may share aspirations and goals they have for their children and family. They may also share concerns and frustrations about barriers they encounter. Including families' ideas, ambitions, and feedback allows for open, two-way interactions that ultimately can favorably influence child and family outcomes and the quality of services and programs (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Tip Use the strategies in this resource to help include families' voices in program and service delivery—for example, in developing, delivering, promoting, and evaluating programs and services. These strategies support consumer engagement outcomes.

Strengths-based attitudes and relationship-based practices are essential to successful consumer engagement. A **strengths-based attitude** is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something. We often see attitudes reflected in a person's behavior. When we approach families with a strengths-based attitude, we show our respect and encourage collaboration.

A strengths-based approach involves the following:

- **Acknowledging the strengths of families first**
- **Respecting and learning from differences**
- **Showing openness to adapting practice based on family preference**
- **Sharing decision making**
- **Approaching families as equal partners in support of their child**

Relationship-based practices guide what we say and do with families. Each family has unique goals and aspirations that we can support through genuine and equal partnerships. When professionals use relationship-based practices that build positive, respectful relationships with families, families are encouraged to be open and receptive to the information provided them. They might also be encouraged to request assistance with challenges they may not have discussed otherwise, such as domestic violence or homelessness. Relationship-based practices can also encourage families to act on opportunities to become involved as leaders and advocates.

Examples of relationship-based practices include:

- **Focus on the family-child relationship.** Families need to know that their relationship with their child is valued and supported by staff.
- **Reflect on the family's individual and cultural perspectives.** We can work toward strong partnerships by showing genuine interest in families. This practice is particularly useful when cultural differences emerge.
- **Reflect on your personal and cultural perspectives.** Our perspectives shape our conversations with families. It's important to consider our own views when working with families. This practice encourages us to reflect on our interactions so that we can intentionally choose what we say and do.

- **Support parental competence—the parent's skills and self-confidence.** Families benefit when we acknowledge their successes, growth, and efforts.
- **Value a family's passion—work with both their positive and negative feelings.** Raising children and working with families always involves emotions. We can expect parents to have feelings about what is happening in their families. No matter how professional we are, emotions are also part of how we react to families. It is important to understand that these emotions come from our shared concern for the child. This can form a common ground to address challenges and move forward.

Cultural and linguistic responsiveness are also key to consumer engagement. Culturally and linguistically responsive practices in consumer engagement recognize, affirm, and showcase families' diverse cultures, knowledge, and experiences. Culturally and linguistically responsive interactions with families are:

- **Respectful.** Professionals recognize and regard families' and their own identities as multidimensional. We are all individuals and members of multiple social and cultural communities.
- **Reciprocal.** Professionals acknowledge that families have much to contribute and that we work together to find, share, and use information in support of families' well-being
- **Responsive.** Professionals focus on connections between the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of families and those of our own (Barrera & Kramer, 2007).

Culturally and linguistically responsive practices are also inclusive. As you seek to engage families across your state or in your local community, be sure to invite input from all the groups of families represented in your area. Identify and lessen or eliminate barriers to families' participation. This includes potential barriers to access as they relate to race, ethnicity, life conditions, geographical locations and settings, language, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, differing abilities, religion, family characteristics, and other ways that families may be unique.

If you are unable to reach certain groups of families directly, draw upon partnerships with community organizations that serve these families to help you connect. Tribal organizations, faith-based organizations, libraries, social service agencies, community programs, and local cultural programs and associations often have relationships that you can tap into. Seek out and build relationships with community leaders whom families trust, and then reach out to families together.

Consumer Engagement: Strategies for Engaging Families

Related Resources

Consumer Engagement

Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-Age Care and Education Professionals (T/TA Resource)
Explore a vision for engaging families as consumers of early childhood and school-age care and education services. Discover and expl ains how this vision relates to consumer education and family engagement. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-engagement-orientation-early-childhood-and-school-age-care-education-professionals

Including Families' Voices

Not About Me, Without Me: Raising Parent Voice to Guide Early Childhood Policy (Report)
Review this report of a meta-analysis of 18 parent surveys, focus groups, and meetings with more than 2,000 parents in North Carolina conducted by organizations that support children and families. The report identifies what helps and hinders parents as they support their young children's healthy development.
http://buildthefoundation.org/2017/12/raising-parent-voice-to-guide-early-childhood-policy/

Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices

Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices (T/TA Resource)
Learn about the benefits of relationships with families, strengths-based attitudes and relationship-based practices, practical examples, and additional resources and references.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strategies-family-engagement-attitudes-and-practices

Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

Family Engagement and Cultural Perspectives: Applying Strengths-based Attitudes (T/TA Resource)
Explore how understanding families' cultural perspectives can positively impact relationship-building and family engagement efforts. The guide is intended for program-level professionals. System-level professionals may find this resource useful for training and reflective practice. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/family-engagement-and-cultural-perspectives-applying-strengths-based-attitudes

American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness (Guidelines)
Learn about ways to enhance cultural competence in providing services to American Indian/Alaska Native communities.
https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA08-4354/SMA08-4354.pdf

For more information about consumer education and consumer engagement, visit Child Care Technical Assistance web site:

- National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement
  https://childcareta.acf.hhs. gov/centers/national-center-parent-family-and-community-engagement

- Family Engagement and Consumer Education
  https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/topics/family-engagement-and-consumer-education

Strategies for Consumer Engagement

Explore eight strategies for consumer engagement along with related resources and examples. We present the strategies in no particular order or ranking. We encourage you to select strategies that align with the strengths, needs, interests, and cultures of families in your communities and available resources. The cost, time and effort required for each strategy may depend on the assets you already have in place.

Include Interactive Features in Websites and Social Media Posts

A website is useful for providing information to families. Websites can be used to invite input from, and engaging with families. Features such as pop-up surveys and feedback buttons are examples of ways to invite input from families about the usefulness of your website.

Ask both open- and close-ended questions, such as "Were you able to find everything you were looking for? Yes or No. If not, what was missing?" These kinds of questions can help you learn how well your site addresses families' interests and needs and identify opportunities for improvements.

Use a "Contact Us" portal as a way to invite families to ask questions and leave comments. Be sure to explain how and when and families can expect to receive a response to their inquiry. A live chat option will allow you to respond to families' interests, questions, and concerns in real time.

Ensure that these interactive features are managed by trained representatives who are sensitive to families' strengths, concerns, and expressed needs. "Live chat" representatives can also encourage families to visit, share, and comment on your social media page(s).

> ### 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule Section 98.33
>
> Lead Agencies are required "to collect and disseminate consumer education information to parents of eligible children, the general public, and providers through a consumer-friendly and easily accessible website."
>
> You can find more information about CCDF Reauthorization and the Final Rule at https://www.acf. hhs.gov/occ/ ccdf-reauthorization.
>
> Tribes are exempt from the requirement for a consumer education website. Learn more at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ occ/resource/ ccdf-final-rule-tribal-fact-sheet

Engage families through social media. Listen and respond to their needs, concerns, and comments. Encourage families to share resources with other families. Include social media as part of your consumer education and engagement efforts. This approach can encourage a sense of community and provide a space for families to seek and share information with others.

Use your website to connect families to your social media page (and use your social media page to connect with new and established families). Encourage families to share the links from your webpage with other families.

For users who are interested, consider linking families to quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) information. Consider offering tips sheets on child development, on developmental screening, and on selecting a quality child care provider.

Develop an electronic newsletter, blog, or video blog to build community and engage families. These vehicles can help you share relevant and useful information and regularly and consistently guide families to your website. They also can connect families to one another and to your internal and external agency partners.

Examples

Texas' consumer education website includes a tool bar of icons that promote sharing the website's resources on social media. The feature also tracks the number of times the webpages have been shared. http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Information_for_Parents/default.asp

The State of Delaware's consumer education website includes a "Start Sharing" section that features stories from families participating in quality-rated programs and invites parents to share their own stories. Another section of the website, "Start Something," invites parents to speak out, stay informed, and engage as advocates. http://www.greatstartsdelaware.com/index.html

The Science of Parenting (Blog)
In weekly blog posts, specialists from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach share their experiences, thoughts, and observations about parenting and how they relate to current research. Parents are invited to share their experiences and how they handle parenting responsibilities. https://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/scienceofparenting/

Related Resources

Consumer Education Websites: Creating a Family-Friendly Experience (T/TA Resource)
Find research-based information in this guide that you can use to create or enhance a family-friendly consumer education website.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-education-websites-guide-creating-family-friendly-experience-and-assessment-tool

Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families (T/TA Resource)
Explore information about how families use social media and offers strategies for creating and implementing a plan to engage families through social media.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/centers/national-center-parent-family-and-community-engagement

Designing Family-Friendly Consumer Education on Child Care (T/TA Resource)
Find guidance about family's perspectives on searching for early care and education. The brief specifically features research on why families search, how families search, and what features families look for in child care to inform design considerations.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ sites/default/files/public/designing_family_friendly_consumer_education_on_child_care.pdf

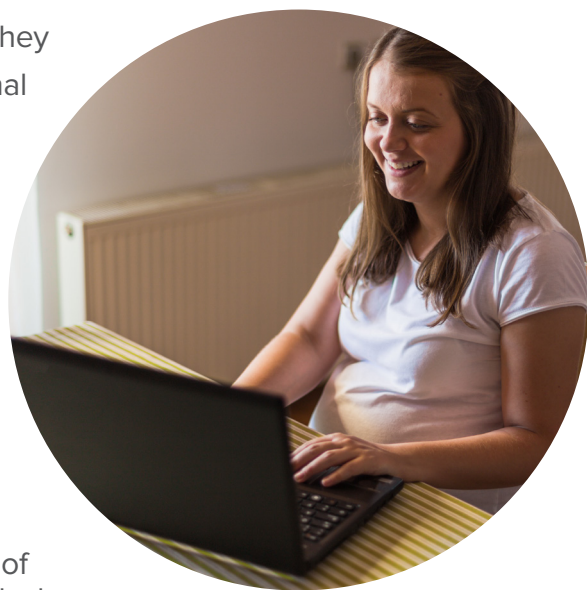**Foundations for Quality Series—Consumer Education Websites: Creating a Family-Friendly Experience (T/TA Resource)**
Find research-based information in this guide that you can use to create or enhance a family-friendly consumer education website.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-education-websites-guide-creating-family-friendly-experience-and-assessment-tool

Foundations for Quality Series—Consumer Engagement: Using Social Media to Engage Families (T/TA Resource)
Explore information about how families use social media and offers strategies for creating and implementing a plan to engage families through social media.
https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/centers/national-center-parent-family-and-communityengagement

> **Consumer Engagement Outcome:** When parents are engaged in the development or review of a consumer education website, or when they are using a consumer education website, they can act as decision makers, resourceful users, and leaders. When parents are engaged through social media, they can experience similar outcomes. Parents can also serve as trusted peers who help their friends and families understand and connect with high-quality options.

Conduct a Community Assessment

States, Territories and Tribes can promote a better understanding of the strengths, interests, and needs of families at local levels. They can do this by encouraging the use of community assessments and, most importantly, by ensuring that families are included in the processes. A community assessment is one way to collect, analyze, aggregate, and use data, information, and knowledge about families. Findings can be used to develop standards, skills, and approaches that match families' cultures, increase the quality and appropriateness of services, and ultimately produce better outcomes.

In general, regular community assessments can help build the cultural competence of services and programs, which, in turn, can improve outcomes for children and families (Whaley & Davis, 2007). Likewise, a community assessment is useful for answering a number of questions related to consumer engagement. For example, "Who are the children and families we work with? How can we help families

> **Community Assessment**
> A community assessment offers the opportunity to interact and build relationships directly with families and community partners throughout the process. The findings can enhance your understanding of the strengths, needs, and interests of the families you are working with.

Consumer Engagement: Strategies for Engaging Families

satisfy their wants and needs for their children and their family well-being? How can we assist families in accomplishing goals they set for themselves?

What kinds of assets, gaps, and opportunities exist in our community to support families' access and use of high-quality early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services?"

Parents are an important source of information and key advisors in answering these questions. Parents can share information about

- what they value and why;
- their experiences and satisfaction with the availability, accessibility, and quality of services, and;
- their experiences with practical considerations that impact service delivery, such as the local economy, employment opportunities, and transportation.

Parents also can act as channels for information, views, and voices from other families (HHS/ACF/OHS, 2008).

Consider the approach that best fits your capacities and intended purposes:

- Work with families and community partners to conduct a new community assessment.
- Review, together with families, community assessments other organizations have completed.
- Collaborate with organizations that routinely conduct community assessments, and include families in the process of gathering and analyzing input.

Community Assessments are often conducted by and available through such agencies as Head Start and Early Head Start; United Way agencies; Federal Maternal, Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV); and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Grantees. In some states, Community Action Agencies develop community assessments thorough needs-assessment reports. Tribes also sometimes conduct community assessments.

States, Territories, Tribes, and organizations working in the same area can learn from one another and coordinate services by collaborating in community assessment efforts.

Identify ways to ensure that your community assessment is inclusive. An inclusive community assessment can help you identify and involve families whose voices might otherwise be left out—for example, families experiencing homelessness or families whose first language is not English.

Whenever possible, ensure that families have the option to participate in the assessment process in their primary language rather than through a translation or interpreter.

Using Community Assessment to Advance Cultural Competence and Racially Equitable Outcomes for Young Children and Their Families
Watch this recorded webinar from the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance about the components and development of community assessments. Learn and how professionals can use community assessment data to identify and serve new and underserved populations as well as those in greatest need of early education services.
http://qrisnetwork.org/member/calendar/event/160610/using-community-assessment-advance-cultural-competence-and-racially-equ

Five Steps to Community Assessment: A Workbook for Head Start and Early Head Start Programs Serving Hispanic and Other Emerging Populations
Designed with Head Start policies and families in mind, this workbook offers basic steps and considerations that can be broadly applied to early childhood services and services for school-age children.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/five-steps-to-community-assessment.pdf

Limited English Proficiency (LEP.gov)
Refer to the Limited English Proficiency LEP.gov, a federal interagency website, for resources for serving families with limited English proficiency. The site includes mapping tools, translation tip sheets, and FAQs.
http://www.lep.gov/

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents provide input for community assessments, they act as decision makers and leaders of quality early childhood and school-age care and education in their communities.

Hold Data Walks

Hold data walks to share, explore, and generate responses to data and research findings (from community assessments, surveys, etc.) about topics that directly affect families. Examples of topics are: supply and demand for early childhood care and education services, program quality, accessibility, cost, and funding.

A data walk is a convening where participants (professionals and families) are invited to walk around a room in pairs or small groups to look at data that is posted on the walls. The posted data include graphs, charts, and texts that are professionally prepared. Participants review all the data, discuss their reactions and answer guiding questions.

Once everyone has had a chance to review all the data, a facilitator gathers the small groups together to discuss reactions and responses as a large group.

Potential benefits of data walks include:

- Families and professionals can work together to build their knowledge and become more skillful at interpreting and applying research-based information.

- By drawing upon their personal experiences, families may be able to fill in gaps or provide fuller explanations for the data and research findings.

- Families and professionals have an opportunity to build and exercise leadership capabilities and participate in collective problem solving to address issues that affect them and their communities.

Data walks may also be combined with focus groups (discussed below). You may begin your focus group convening with a data walk and then break up families into smaller groups. You may find that by starting your focus group with a data walk, the dialogue will be deepened and more targeted. Use the feedback received from families to inform your programs and policies.

Related Resources

Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities
Use this guidebook, developed by the Urban Institute, to learn about how to design, plan, and facilitate a data walk as a means of engaging families by sharing data on issues that directly affect them and eliciting their responses to help inform and improve your programs and policies.
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/72906/2000510-Data-Walks-An-Innovative-Way-to-Share-Data-with-Communities.pdf

"Data Walk" Is a Key Tool in Results-Based Leadership
Read this blog article and 5-minute video from The Annie E. Casey Foundation about what a data walk looks like and exactly what materials to consider using in your event—for example, a large banner stating your overarching goal and large charts that can be seen easily from around the room.
http://www.aecf.org/blog/data-walk-is-a-key-tool-in-results-based-leadership/

Data Equity Walk Toolkit, Option 2, Do It Yourself Data Slides
Find a number of resources for data walks from the Education Trust-West (California). The content is designed for higher education, but can be applied broadly in early childhood care and education. For example, Data Presentation Ideas is a "how-to" about using charts to depict data. Tips for Printing and Logistical Prep offers ideas for presenting your data based on the budget for your event.
https://west.edtrust.org/do-it-yourself-data-slides/

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents participate in data walks, they act as **leaders** and advocates for their communities.

Conduct Focus Groups

Convene groups of parents willing to answer questions about their interests and needs and share their opinions about services. Consider the gender, age, occupation, geographic location, ethnicity, and language of families so that the data you collect is complete and relevant to gaps in existing knowledge. Keep in mind that individuals cannot represent a population.

Organize a number of events and group parents who are similar to one another based on demographics. This will help ensure a more representative sample of the group and will encourage families to feel more comfortable talking about sensitive issues.

To encourage open and honest responses, make sure that participants do not know one another (SAMHSA, 2017). After the focus group, follow up with families to explain how their input was used and to invite them to become engaged as partners in other ways.

Example

Findings and Recommendations: Delaware Early Childhood Focus Group Study
Review this study about a series of focus groups with families. It features two sections—Methodology and Moderators Guide—that may be particularly useful to programs interested in staging focus groups.
http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/chca/files/focusgroupfinal.pdf

Related Resource

Community Tool Box: Conducting Focus Groups
Use this toolbox from the University of Kansas to find a number of resources for assessing community strengths and needs, engaging stakeholders, action planning, and more. Chapter 3, Section 6, Conducting Focus Groups, is an overview of the basics for conducting focus groups.
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents participate in focus groups, they act as resourceful users, trusted peers, and leaders in program development.

Conduct Surveys

Conduct surveys to collect opinions and feedback from families. Surveys, where permitted, may be useful for learning about the quality of families' experiences with programs and services. Surveys can help you identify the strengths and needs of families, which, in turn, can help you identify where enhancements or adjustments in programs and services are needed. Surveys are a way to maintain contact with families. Surveys are also useful for reaching potential consumers.

As with all of the strategies described in this resource, be sure to consider whether or not this strategy is a good match for the consumers or family members you want to engage. Be sure to assess the cultural appropriateness of the use of surveys and survey questions for the group you are seeking to survey. Explore potential opportunities for collaboration with community or Tribal leaders.

In general, surveys are a good choice when:

- You need a quick and efficient way of getting information
- You want to collect information from a large number of families
- You need statistically valid information about a large number of people
- The information you need isn't readily available through other means (Community Toolbox, n.d.)

Example

Early Learning Needs in Washington State Among Native American Families: A Summary of a Survey of Parents for The First Peoples, First Steps Alliance
Review this example of a community survey conducted in Washington State. Parents were asked to rate the importance of 21 factors to consider when someone else takes care of their children (in any kind of child care setting).

Questions asked what kinds of information parents want and what sources they use for information on child development, health, and learning. Parent perceptions about quality in Head Start compared to other programs were also explored.

Respondents represented 75 Nations, including 19 of the 29 federally recognized Tribes in Washington State. Their feedback was used to inform the work of Tribal Leaders Congress, Tribal Councils, and other partners in developing and improving program activities. To access this document, click on "Parent Needs Assessment Report."
https://thrivewa.org/work/community-programs-and-initiatives/

Related Resources

Community Tool Box: Conducting Surveys
Access this toolbox from the University of Kansas for a number of tools. Chapter 3, Section 13, "Conducting Surveys," is an overview of the basics of conducting surveys.
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-surveys/main

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Implementation Guidance on Data Collection Standards for Race, Ethnicity, Sex, Primary Language, and Disability Status
Explore this website (also available as a PDF) for standardized data collection questions for race, ethnicity, sex, primary language, and disability status.
https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/hhs-implementation-guidance-data-collection-standards-race-ethnicity-sex-primary-language-and-disability-status

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents are engaged through surveys, they can act as trusted peers who share information and as leaders who help to inform programs and services. They may also learn information that can influence their decision making and their resourceful use of programs and services.

Hold Town Hall Meetings

Organize events for parents to engage with other community leaders to discuss issues, listen to comments, and answer questions. Invite families to ask questions, share opinions, and talk about their experiences with the issues addressed at the meeting.

Organizing a town hall meeting is a way for some communities to create engagement with families. For some Tribes, however, this strategy may not be practical or fit with cultural values. If you are considering this strategy as a way to reach out to Tribal communities, consult Tribal leaders first to confirm alignment.

Related Resource:

The State of Young Children: A Community Town Hall—The Toolkit
In this toolkit from California First 5, find a full menu of guidance and tools for organizing a town hall event, including templates for such essential print items as agendas, issue papers, and panelist questions.
http://www.ccfc.ca.gov/townhall/toolkit.html

Organize Parent, Community, or World Cafés

Organize structured, small group conversations to bring parents and professionals together to discuss early childhood and school-age care and education. Hold these conversations in safe and inviting environments, with tables arranged in small groupings around the room, as in a café. Invite parents to move among tables and to speak with peers in multiple rounds of conversations focused on specific questions.

A trained peer host can ensure an inclusive, intimate environment in which parents, professionals and community members can share information with and encourage each other. Trained staff and/ or peer hosts can support participants in developing their leadership skills towards becoming peer hosts for future cafés and/or eventually training other parents.

Related Resources

Community Café: Tools and Resources
Find tools, resources, contacts, and a blog on developing community cafés on this website. Resources are available in English and Spanish.
http://thecommunitycafe.org/tools-resources/resources/

The World Café Hosting Tool Kit
Use this toolkit to find brief outlines of the principles and elements of cafés, along with tips for etiquette and ambiance. Resources are provided in multiple languages.
http://www.theworldcafe.com/tools-store/hosting-tool-kit/

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents participate in Parent, Community, or World Cafés, they act as trusted peers and leaders.

Promote or Form Parent Leadership Groups and Parent Advisory Boards

Promote the development of parent advisory boards. Examples include, Interagency Coordinating Councils that are part of some quality rating and improvement systems and Head Start. These boards present opportunities for meaningful exchanges of information with parents and encourage shared decision making.

Staff can support parent participation by

- providing child care;
- arranging transportation;
- scheduling events at times convenient for parents;

- orienting parents to the depth and breadth of the role of parents at meetings;

- making reminder phone calls;

- distributing agendas or other materials ahead of time;

- supporting parent-to-parent communication;

- addressing needs of non-custodial parents;

- addressing language, culture, and work barriers; and

- demonstrating that parents' contributions are valued by following up appropriately (Michigan Department of Education, 2017).

Related Resources

Head Start Policy and Regulations: Policy Council and Policy Committee
Head Start Policy Councils are made up of current Head Start families and community members who wish to serve as a link between families and the governance board. Policy Council members are elected by their peers.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1301-3-policy-council-policy-committee

Head Start Parent Committees
Head Start Parent Committees are established at the program or local level. Parent committees advise the development and implementation of local program policies, activities, and services; communicate with governance bodies; and, within guidelines, participate in the recruitment and screening of Early Head Start and Head Start staff.
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1301-4-parent-committees

Building Parent Leadership: Today's Parent Leaders: A Manual for Parent Leadership Month
Use this manual, created by the Georgia Department of Education, to find tips and tools for organizing, planning, and implementing events, activities, and outreach programs. The content is designed for schools, but can be applied broadly.
https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Documents/Parent Leadership Manual REVISED.pdf

Consumer Engagement Outcome: When parents are engaged in parent advisory boards, they act as trusted peers and leaders who share information and drive

Bringing Consumer Engagement Full Circle

A key part of each consumer engagement strategy described in this resource is the opportunity for families and professionals to build and maintain their connections over time. When professionals maintain their connections with families, they can create feedback loops. A feedback loop is an intentional communication process set up across levels of a system for the purpose of identifying and correcting issues that may arise in implementing an innovation, program, service, or practice (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2012).

Consumer Engagement: Strategies for Engaging Families

Feedback loops (information sharing) can facilitate relationships in which professionals and families can work together to inform and reinforce one another's actions.

Here is an example of an ongoing feedback loop:

Consumer Engagement Feedback Loop

An agency responsible for consumer education holds a series of focus groups with parents. The purpose is to find out what consumer education information interests parents and how they prefer to receive that information.

The agency recognizes parents for their contributions. The agency uses parents' input to develop resources. The resources include information requested by parents. The resources are created in forrmats preferred by parents.

Agency staff channel feedback from families or invite families to join staff meetings and internal agency strategy meetings. The purpose is to integrate families voices into ongoing agency decisions and practices.

Parents who participated in the development of the resources are notified when the resources are launched and when efforts are evaluated. Families help assess how well the resources and their delivery met desired goals.

Before resources are finalized, the agency shares planned resources (brochures, promotional messages, and sample webpages) with parents. Parent feedback is incorporated into the final products.

Evaluating Your Efforts

Evaluating the usefulness of your efforts is an important step for continuous improvement. Whether implementing a comprehensive consumer engagement plan or a few select strategies to engage consumers, consider opportunities to engage families in evaluation.

Before applying a consumer engagement strategy, be sure to set up data systems to prepare, collect, aggregate, analyze, and review data regularly. Gather input from families about what data is important to them. Invite families to join you in setting goals related to these data, and planning to monitor progress toward these goals.

Work to ensure that participating families are representative of the families in your state or service area. Close the loop with families by sharing the findings from the data collection they supported.

Collect and analyze data to determine which strategies were effective in reaching families, especially in any communities identified in the goal-setting process. Does the data collected indicate there was equitable access? If not, what barriers may have made it difficult for families to participate?

Use this information to draft a continuous quality improvement plan that includes and builds on strategies used in the earlier stages. For example, if your assessment data indicates family groups that are underrepresented (for example, families experiencing homelessness), review the strategies tried and explore whether a different or new strategy might be more successful.

Questions to Consider

As you begin, the following questions can be helpful:

Before implementation:

- For a given strategy, what is our intended outcome?
- What does success for a given strategy look like?
- What data will we use to assess our progress toward outcomes?

During and after implementation:

- What are we hearing from parents?
- Who is benefitting from our efforts? Who is not?
- How will we apply what we learn in this evaluation to our quality improvement efforts?

Related Resource

Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders: A Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Nonprofits and Schools
Use this resource to assess agency efforts to promote family engagement and capacity building.
http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EngagingParentsDevelopingLeaders-2016.pdf

Consumer Engagement: Strategies for Engaging Families

Closing Thoughts

We have designed this resource to help you understand consumer engagement and to enhance your implementation efforts. We hope that you will find the strategies described in this resource useful for engaging parents (as consumers) in the plans, processes, and programs that are part of your everyday responsibilities.

The strategies you choose to implement will depend on the strengths, needs, interests, and cultures of families in your communities, assets you already have in place, and opportunities to build on or strengthen these assets.

We welcome the opportunity to learn about your efforts in consumer engagement. Please contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481.

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